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Organization Research Program

THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE COUNCIL

Jack Larsen

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This paper is one in a program of studies of the policy decision-making process of a government agency under the general direction of Robert C. Wood. It has been reviewed for security classification and released for public dissemination by Dr. Edward C. Welsh, Executive Secretary of the NASC. The author remains solely responsible for its content.

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the origin of the National Aeronautics and Space Council in the closing years of the Eisenhower administration, and its development and institutionalization during the Kennedy administration. The functions, staff, and operations of this unique organization are described.

The National Aeronautics and Space Council was established by the National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958, PL 85-568, with the Council under the Chairmanship of the President. The Council was authorized to have an Executive Secretary and a staff. President Eisenhower did not institutionalize the agency. For the first few months the position of acting Executive Secretary was held by Robert Piland of Dr. Killian's staff. He was followed in January 1959 by Franklyn Phillips, a member of the NASA staff. No reports of activity by the National Aeronautics and Space Council under the Eisenhower administration are available. The Administrator, Mr. Glennan, and Mr. Phillips were variously asked by Congressional committees to describe the operation of the Council, which they respectfully declined to do, citing executive privilege. Actually, under the Eisenhower administration, the Space Council did meet on a number of occasions and established the roles and missions of the various agencies in the space field. In the last year of Eisenhower, it was felt that there was substantially no need for such continuing coordination on an institutionalized basis, and the Council became effectively inactive.

The Eisenhower Council was a staff agency of the President with no program of its own. It is clear that Senator Lyndon Johnson, in shaping the law that created the Council, contemplated for it a more active role in guiding and coordinating a national space effort. He contemplated that the Council should have its own full-time professional staff to give it some equality relative to the agencies in knowledge which is the power to formulate a truly national program and that it do more than merely compromise conflicting claims between agencies.

In time history will disclose the nature of the arrangements made between Senator Johnson and the nominee at San Francisco. But it seems clear that the nominee made a commitment to his running-mate that as an officer of the Executive Department, the Vice President would have a position of influence in the nation's aerospace program commensurate with that which he had enjoyed as Chairman of the Senate Committee and as Majority Leader.

The Act made the Space Council extraordinary within the Executive Office with respect to its professional staff, its responsibility to its constituent agencies, and its degree of independent decision-making ability. The agency became unique when, in accordance with Public Law 87-26 of the new administration, the Act was amended to designate the Vice President to be the Chairman of the Council. In the same amendment the membership was cut from nine to five, eliminating one government and three non-government members. The Space Council would be available to advise the President on all aeronautical and space matters. It would also provide a vehicle for the Vice President by which he could bring to bear on policy his knowledge and vigorous interest in space progress.

In addition to numerous special assignments abroad, the Vice President has important responsibilities as a member of the National Security Council, in civil rights, and as a statutory representative of the Administration in its relations with the Senate. In space, the Vice President probably finds fewer headaches and more fun than in his other areas of responsibility.

However, despite his evident real interest in space matters, a series of domestic and foreign crises have allowed the Vice President to give only part of his attention to space and the Space Council.

Vice President Johnson chose Dr. Edward C. Welsh as Executive Secretary for the Space Council. Dr. Welsh is an economist who came to Washington for brief periods as a consultant with the National Resources Committee and the Roosevelt Administration. During the war he was Deputy Administrator of the Office of Price Administration and later was in charge of decartelizing Japanese industry under General MacArthur. He returned to the United States to join the staff of Stuart Symington, at first with the National Security Resources Board, then with the RFC, and at the end of the Truman Administration he joined Symington's Senate staff as legislative assistant. On Johnson's recommendation Dr. Welsh was appointed by the President on the White House staff pending the availability of funds for his agency in the new budget. Dr. Welsh brought with him to the Space Council two long-time government administrators who had worked with him previously. Russell Hale from the State Department, formerly Deputy Administrator of the Battle Act, is his confidential assistant. Edward Lacey was appointed Administrative Officer of the agency responsible for personnel and fiscal problems. Richard Hirsch, on loan from the National Security Council, two former White House secretaries and a messenger constituted the staff until Welsh obtained his own budget in September 1961.

The first act of the vitalized (not revitalized) Space Council was to assist the President in the preparation of his

message of May 25, 1961, which called for an across-the-board accelerated space program. In particular the Space Council recommended an immediate step-up in the large booster program calling for a FY 1961 supplemental request to the Congress and an expanded FY 1962 commitment.

The next major task of the small Space Council staff was the formulation of advice concerning the Communications Satellite Policy issued in July 1961 by the President upon the unanimous recommendation of the Space Council. The resulting policy asserted that a Satellite Communications System was in the public interest, that a world-wide system should be established under private enterprise with a number of safeguards proposed to prevent domination of the system by any single economic interest such as the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. The Policy placed the administration behind the creation of some sort of private corporation to operate the communication satellites in the public interest.

At the request of the Attorney General and as a consequence of this policy, the Space Council staff worked out modifications in the patent procedures in the various Government agencies concerned.

From the promulgation of the Policy in July 1961, until the Satellite Communications Act was signed August 31, 1962, the bill was the principal concern of the Space Council staff. The original Administration bill was written under the direction of Dr. Welsh who suffered a heart attack in December 1961 at the height of his efforts to secure interagency coordination of the bill prior to the convening of Congress in January 1962.

This development is typical of the Space Council activities. The conflicts to be resolved did not depend on scientific knowledge. It is not the function of the Council to interfere with the internal operations of an agency having responsibility for a project. The major space programs are the responsibilities of the Department of Defense and NASA. The Space Council has been only an interested observer of major decisions by these agencies. The NASC participation in the LOR decision is an example. NASA experts briefed the Council on the various methods for the APOLLO missions. It was uniformly agreed that any of the methods was feasible. It was clear therefore that the decision called for weighing such factors as relative safety, time, schedules, and costs. The Space Council took no action to rule on those various factors but rather left it to the responsible agency, NASA, to make the decision, after being assured that the matter had been studied thoroughly.

Persons not well acquainted with the operation of the Space Council or unsympathetic to its creation may be led by such an example to feel that the Council is merely an appendage of the Vice President which is both unnecessary and ineffectual since it has had very little apparent effect on the large programs of NASA and the Department of Defense where after all most of the money is spent.

On the other hand the agencies having lesser interests in space such as the Weather Bureau, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the State Department find the Space Council and the Council's staff important allies in their struggles with the Budget Bureau, NASA, and DOD for recognition of their legitimate aims. For

example Dr. Seaborg, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, personally feels that the development of atomic energy for both propulsion and auxiliary systems is vital to the progress of advanced space systems. Accordingly Dr. Seaborg personally and members of his staff have devoted a great deal of effort to courting the Space Council staff and bringing to the attention of the Council members the mission of the Atomic Energy Commission in space. When the time came for flight testing from Cape Canaveral the first SNAP nuclear power supply for space vehicles there was a slight possibility that debris might fall on the territory of Cuba. The Space Council was responsible for coordinating the necessary policy decisions in connection with this launching, a world's first. Max Hunter, an expert on nuclear propulsion of space vehicles, had joined the Space Council staff as a senior professional assistant. The Council in 1961 also assisted in the drafting and coordinating of the President's policy statement on the WEST FORD project which had generated some considerable interest and opposition in the world community of radio astronomers.

The Vice President and the Space Council's staff have been responsible for answering most letters addressed to the White House relating to space and aeronautics. In connection with such letters and with speeches by the President, the Vice President, the Executive Secretary and others, reference is often made to the competition or "space race" between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Space Council staff maintains a running box-score of the space race.

The January 1963 report of the Vice President on the activities of the Space Council for 1962 lists among the activities of the Council and staff that they had:

- a. "drafted statements of national space objectives and missions"

The U.S. is committed to the peaceful exploitation of outer space. Many influential officials within the administration felt that a statement of national space objectives could be formulated in unclassified language and that the issuance of such a statement by the administration would be helpful in the foreign relations of the U.S. The Space Council and its staff made continuing efforts throughout 1962 to achieve a wording that would be uniformly acceptable and meaningful. No final policy statement has however emerged from the Administration.

- b. "prepared and recommended legislation to implement the communications satellite policy;"

As stated above, the Executive Secretary was the principal agent of the Administration in preparing the communication satellite bill. He worked closely with Commissioner Minow, Deputy Attorney General Katzenbach and the White House in this connection.

- c. "assisted in drawing up the criteria and functions as regards the incorporators for the communications satellite corporation and also reviewed drafts of articles of incorporation and by-laws;"

It is expected that the stock in the communications satellite corporation would be widely held by the public, and accordingly the original management of the corporation could for a long time influence the nature of the corporation and its ability to serve the public interest. Through naming the incorporators, the

President gave his bent to the twig which will grow into the corporate tree. Members of the Space Council and the Executive Secretary participated in the White House deliberation concerning the qualifications for incorporators and in the talent search for the 13 distinguished American business men who were named by the President.

- d. "encouraged, through inter-agency meetings, the coordination of NASA and Defense Department plans for communications satellites;"

The Space Council held a series of meetings to prepare the record for more vigorous direction of these programs in the future should events prove that the agencies had been inadequate in their own planning.

- e. "encouraged and assisted in increasing the emphasis upon life sciences activities in NASA and in coordination between Defense and NASA in this field;"

At the request of the Executive Secretary, the life-sciences panel of the Presidents Scientific Advisory Committee studied the life sciences problem. Recommendations were made to NASA. Dr. Eugene B. Konecci, Dr. Orr E. Reynolds, and Brig. Gen. Charles H. Rodman have been appointed in this area.

- f. "participated in the development of plans and policies for increased cooperation between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. in outer space;"
- g. "assisted in the preparation of the U.S. resolution introduced in the United Nations on the peaceful uses

of outer space and participated in the developments of U.S. positions on space for the 17th General Assembly."

The Staff provided a meeting point for State Department, NASA, USIA and White House language with respect to the proposed resolutions.

- h. "supervised the preparation and conducted the editing of the President's annual report to the Congress on U.S. astronautics and space activities for 1962;"

After promulgating guide-lines on the required report to the eleven reporting activities and holding a series of meetings in Washington to supervise the content of the reports, the Staff collected and edited the contributed material and wrote portions to produce the unified published document; and also advised the President in connection with the forwarding message.

- i. "testified on space policies and space activities before Committees of the Congress."

Dr. Welsh is frequently asked to testify on various subjects relating to space and is in a position to represent an Administration point of view.

- j. "visited space installations, examined facilities and discussed space developments and problems with managerial and technical specialists;"

The professional staff of the Council is gaining expertise. It provides the President and the Vice President with staff assistants on such visits and is accumulating a store of know-how on the national space assets which will be available to the President informally within the Executive office.

- k. "requested a study of costs and market projections for supersonic transports;"
- l. "participated in the analysis and development of the Fiscal Year 1964 budgets for space;"

- m. "increased the public understanding of the national space program through speeches, articles, public appearances, and interviews;"

Dr. Welsh and the Vice President are both frequent speakers on subjects relating to space and aeronautics. Articles on the national space program have appeared in various technical journals over the signatures of Dr. Welsh or the Vice President.

- n. "recommended top priority ratings for the APOLLO and CENTAUR projects; and
- o. "engaged in numerous inter-agency, as well as government-industry meetings and briefings on new developments in space technology."

In the year 1962, the Space Council built its staff to a total of 29 persons (including secretarial, clerical, messengers, etc.). In 1962 the Vice President procured a minor amendment to the law whereby members of the Space Council staff for such time as they are detailed to work directly for the Vice President are exempted from the provisions of the Hatch Act to the extent that employees of the Legislative Branch are so exempted. Only a small part of the staff has ever been so detailed.

In general, the Space Council is still in a period of infancy. There are few precedents for its guidance. Meetings of the whole Council are relatively infrequent but when held, attendance by principals rather than alternates is the rule.

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